Realism in the Later Middle Ages: an Introduction

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Medieval realism and nominalism are the two major theoretical alternatives concerning the reality of general objects (universals, according to the medieval terminology): realists believed in the objectivity of real species and common natures; nominalists did not. In their turn, realists disagreed over <1> the ontological status of such common natures, and <2> the relationship between them and the individuals in which they are present. In particular, according to the so-called "moderate realist" view (endorsed by authors such as Albert the Great, Thomas Aquinas, John Duns Scotus, and Walter Burley before 1324), universals are not self-subsistent things (or entities), but exist only in singular things, as universals have no being outside the being of their particular instantiations. What is more, the being of universals coincides with the being of their instantiations as individuals, so that universals can be said to be everlasting because of the succession of these individuals, not because of a peculiar kind of *esse*. But whereas in Albert's and Aquinas's opinion universals exist *in potentia* outside the mind, and *in actu* within the mind, on Duns Scotus's and Burley's account they exist *in actu* outside the mind, since for Duns Scotus and Burley the necessary and sufficient condition for a universal to be *in actu* is the existence of at least one individual instantiating it. On the other hand, according to all these thinkers, universals and individuals, if considered as properly universals and individuals, are different from each others, since no universal *qua* such is an individual, nor *vice versa*.

In the third decade of the fourteenth century, in his commentaries on the *Categories* and the *De interpretatione* and in the first part of his *Summa logicae* Ockham argued that the common realist account of the relationship between universals and individuals was inconsistent with the standard definition of real identity: if universals are something existing *in re*, really identical with their individuals considered as instances of a type (e.g., the universal man *qua* man is identical with Socrates), but different considered as properly universals and individuals (e.g., man *qua* universal is

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different from Socrates considered *qua* individual), then whatever is predicated of the individuals must be predicated of their universals too, and so a unique general object (say, the human nature) would possess contrary attributes simultaneously via the attributes of different individuals.

Later medieval realists were persuaded that Ockham's criticism was sufficient to show that the traditional realist account of the relation between universals and particulars was unacceptable, but not that realism as a whole was untenable. Thus, they tried to remove the unclear and aporetic points stressed by the *Venerabilis Inceptor* by two fundamental strategies: <1> the real distinction between universals and individuals; <2> new notions of identity and distinction. The first strategy is that of Walter Burley, who in his later years (after 1324) many times claimed that universals fully exist outside the mind and are really distinct from the individuals in which they are present and of which they are predicated. The second strategy is that most commonly developed in the later Middle Ages all over the Europe. The present issue of *Vivarium* collects six articles concerning the latter form of later medieval realism and some of its main doctrinal sources.

Fabrizio Amerini examines the reply to Ockham's ontological program that two Italian Dominican masters, Franciscus de Prato and Stephanus de Reate, elaborated from a more traditional, realist point of view derived from Hervaeus Natalis's works. In order to avoid that a universal and any of its individuals were considered to be the same thing, they regarded identity as an intersection of classes of things, so that it was possible to say that two things were really identical without saying that they also are the same thing. In this way they also allowed that two things could be considered as not really identical without entailing that they were also really non-identical and hence really different.

The other articles deal with the most important "school" of later medieval realists, inaugurated by John Wyclif, the so-called "Oxford Realists" (besides Wyclif himself, the Englishmen Robert Alyngton, William Milverley, William Penbygull, Roger Whelpdale, and John Tarteys, as well as the German Johannes Sharpe, and the Italian Paul of Venice), and the Scotistic roots of their main logico-metaphisical theories. According to all these authors <1> universals and individuals were really identical but formally distinct, and <2> predication was a real relation between things. In particular, Wyclif revised Duns Scotus's notion of formal distinction, and developed a form of intensional logic where the main relation between beings is exactly that one of formal distinction, intended as the measure

of the coincidence of the metaphysical components of two *res*. Consequently, starting from the definition of being as what can be signified by a complex expression, Wyclif built up a metaphysics of essences (culminating in an ontological and epistemological primacy of universals over any other kind of beings), by which the subsequent Oxford Realists were to be inspired. Modifying Wyclif's doctrine, they <1> introduced a new type of predication, based on a partial identity between the entities for which the subject and predicate stood, called predication by essence (*praedicatio secundum essentiam*), and <2> redefined the traditional post-Aristotelian categories of essential and accidental predication in terms of this partial identity.

Stephen Dumont investigates Duns Scotus's notion of formal distinction, the main tool that the Oxford Realists utilised in building up their philosophical system. Dumont's study examines Scotus's Parisian definition of the formal distinction, and shows that this later formulation of the formal distinction does not absolutely prohibit an assertion of formalities as correlates of the formal distinction, even in the case of the divine Person, so long as their non-identity is properly qualified—a result that goes against the traditional interpretation of both modern and medieval commentators of Scotus's thought, who had seen Scotus's Parisian treatment of the formal distinction as less realist than the preceding ones, in the sense that it would deny any extra-mentally separate formalities.

Giorgio Pini explores Scotus's legacy to late medieval debates on the ontological status of the categories. In his paper, Pini shows how Scotus's thesis of a real distinction of the ten Aristotelian categories, and his way of articulating it into a comprehensive metaphyisical doctrine are two innovative and not secondary contributions to the later medieval realist ontology.

Paul Vincent Spade and Laurent Cesalli analyse Wyclif's main metaphysical theories. Wyclif is one of the most important and authoritative thinkers of the late Middle Ages and the starting-point of the new forms of realism at the end of the Middle Ages. The chief characteristics of his own form of realism, to which all his contributions can be traced back, are the trust in the scheme object-label as *the* fundamental interpretative key of any semantic problem, and a strong *propensity* towards hypostatization: Wyclif <1> methodically replaces logical and epistemological rules with ontological criteria and references, <2> tries to find ontological grounds for any kind of logical distinction he introduces, and <3> develops his system of logic as a sort of componential analysis, where things

substitute for lexemes and ontological properties for semantic features. Nevertheless, as Paul Vincent Spade shows in his article, he cannot be described as "ultrarealist" in his theory of universals. Spade distinguishes two common medieval notions of a universal: the Aristotelian-Porphyrian one in terms of predication and the Boethian one in terms of being metaphysically common to many. On neither approach does Wyclif's theory of universals postulate new and non-standard entities besides those recognized by more usual versions of realism, so that his theory of universals is less extreme than Walter Burley's.

Laurent Cesalli goes into Wyclif's pan-propositionalism (i.e., the claim that whatever is *is* a proposition) and theory of propositional truth and falsity. Wyclif's theory of proposition derives from Grosseteste's doctrine, that he interprets in the light of his notion of being as *significabile per complexum*. In Wyclif's view, a proposition is a well formed and complete speech, which <1> signifies the true or the false, and <2> can be perfectly understood. Like Grosseteste, he claims that every (linguistic) proposition has a twofold signification: natural and artificial. In its natural signification a proposition means nothing but its own existence, and therefore it is always true; in its artificial signification a proposition signifies what is or what is not, and it may therefore be true or false. According to Wyclif, there are five kinds of propositions: <1> mental, <2> spoken, <3> written; <4> real, and <5> the signified propositions (*et quinta proposicio est sic esse sicut proposicio significat*). The real proposition is nothing but any individual thing in the world, while the signified proposition seems to be any actual situation connected with individual things. In the first part of his paper, Cesalli, starting from Wyclif's fivefold propositional typology, analyses <1> the three different kinds of real predication; <2> the distinction between primary and secondary signification of a proposition (the latter being an instantiation of the former); <3> the status of logical truth as opposed-to, but depending-on, metaphysical truth; and <4> the relationship between Wyclif's notion of *ens logicum*, as intermediate between statements and facts, and Burley's *propositio in re*. The second part of Cesalli's study deals with two semantic and metaphysical implications of the pan-propositionalism: <1> the extended notion of being, and <2> the relation between contents of the divine mind as "archi-truth-makers" and eternal as well as contingent truths.

Finally, in my article I offer an overview of Johannes Sharpe's ontology, together with an analysis of his theory of meaning. Sharpe is the most important and original author among Wyclif's followers: his seman-

tic and metaphysical theories are the end product of the two, main medieval philosophical traditions, realism and nominalism, for he contributed to the new form of realism inaugurated by Wyclif, but was receptive to many nominalist criticisms. In fact, Sharpe substantially shares the metaphysical view and principles of the other Oxford Realists, but he relegates the common realist requirements for the generality (or universality in his terminology) of terms to a minor position within his semantics and substantially accepts the inner sense of nominalist criticisms. He <1> rejects <1.1> the object-label scheme as *the* fundamental interpretative key of any semantic problem and <1.2> hypostatization as a philosophical strategy aimed at methodically replacing logical and epistemological rules with ontological standards and references, and <2> admits Ockham's explanation for the universality of concepts. Unfortunately, this semantic approach partially undermines his defence of realism, since it deprives Sharpe of any compelling semantic and epistemological reasons to posit *universalia in re*.

As the guest editor of the present issue of *Vivarium* I would like to take this opportunity to thank the editorial board of the journal for the invitation to compile the volume. I hope that these studies will contribute to the progress of our understanding of a period, the later Middle Ages, too often neglected by medieval scholars and historians of ideas.